

## Wigan Family and Friends Care Policy

Family and friends might offer care to a child in their family/ friendship group when they are unable for whatever reason to stay with their parents. This can be a very confusing and even sometimes scary experience for a child. There are several ways that you can provide care:

- Private Arrangement also known as Private Fostering
- Child Arrangement Order
- Special Guardianship Order
- Fostering

### Private Fostering

This is when a parent or the child (if they are old enough) asks if you can care for their child or them for a while. This is something that is arranged between families and friends and if this is more than a month (28 days), we, the local authority, need to know about this and will look at what support is available near you to help you care for the child. A privately fostered child is cared for by an adult who is not a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, step-parent (including civil partnerships), sister or brother.

### Child Arrangements Order

A Child Arrangements Order (CAO) - previously a Residence Order - is a court order to make a private arrangement for you to care for a child legal.

The person named in a CAO shares parental responsibility for the child with the parents, and can make most of important decisions on behalf of the child without needing the permission of the parents for everything - but it is good to share these decisions when you can. The most common example of where there might be a Child Arrangement Order is when parent's divorce or separate. In the order the court can say:

- Who a child is to live with, spend time or otherwise have family time (contact)
- When these arrangements should happen
- Who the child should live with – this can last until the child reaches 18 years

If the court makes a CAO for a child to you, you will be able to claim Child Benefit and Child Tax Credits if applicable.

There will not be ongoing social work involvement.

### Special Guardianship Orders

A Special Guardianship Order (often known as an SGO) is a legal order where the court appoints a carer – usually a relative – as the 'Special Guardian' of a child until they turn 18.

If you are a 'Special Guardian' you will share parental responsibility for the child with the parents, and can make nearly all the major decisions about the child without having to have discussed with the parents (although again it is always good if parents are able to be involved if they can).

## Getting a Special Guardianship Order

You will have to tell the children's services department of your local authority that you intend to apply for a SGO and go through an assessment process, to be sure that an SGO is in the child's best interests. This process is like a foster carer assessment.

You can apply through a solicitor, or apply yourself as a 'litigant in person'. It's worth checking whether legal aid is available in your case.

## Support for Special Guardians

We have a Special Guardianship Support Service to support Special Guardians and the assessment completed will include a support plan, specific to your family's needs.

Financial support in the form of a Special Guardianship Allowance is discretionary, although you will be able to claim Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit if applicable. Special Guardianship can be a great option for children who can't live with their parents, as it gives them a stable home life and they are able to keep links to their birth family, while you as the guardian can make independent decisions for the child.

The child would not have a social worker and although there is no requirement for guardians to attend training, you would be able to access training that is offered to foster carers if you wish, and other support may be identified through the support plan.

## What is friends and family foster care?

If a child is unable to live at home with their parents, and the local authority has made this decision and the court supports this decision, the child is then considered a child in care.

In these cases, a social worker will first look to identify family members who may be able to care for their relative or friend's child to help the child to stay within the family and not have to be placed with foster carers who are not known to the child. This is likely to be an extremely emotional time for families who want to commit to caring for their relative or friend's child. An assessment is completed with family and friends who wish to be considered as foster carers to make sure the child or children will be safe and well looked after and that they meet the requirements of a foster carer.

## Who are family and friends carers?

Grandparents, aunts and uncles, adult brothers and sisters, or other family members and people who have an important relationship with the children or their parents.

Being a family and friends foster carer is a big commitment and these are some of the things that would be expected:

- You must be over 18 years of age
- Have an established relationship with the child or the child's parents
- Have secure accommodation with a suitable bedroom for the child to use
- Must be willing to have a medical, police checks and supply character references

- Be able to take the child to school every day and support their education
- Be willing to positively promote family time between the child and their family
- Be willing and able to care for the child on a long-term basis (until adulthood) if required
- Be available for social workers to visit your home when the child is placed
- Work with your own Supervising Social Worker
- Attend regular foster carer training
- Keep daily records about the child
- Attend all meetings relating to the child with the Local Authority and/or school

## **The assessment process**

If the child needs to move in with you urgently before a full assessment can be completed, we may decide to complete a short assessment and grant you temporary approval as a foster carer. Your full fostering assessment will then need to be completed within 16 weeks. A further extension of 8 weeks can be agreed in exceptional circumstances.

If you are being assessed as a Special Guardian or a Family and Friends foster carer, you'll need to have full medical checks and a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS – police check).

If decisions about whether the child can live with their parents are being decided in court, you need to know the assessment about you for SGO or fostering will be given to the courts as part of making the best decisions about where the child's needs are best met.

You'll need to provide a minimum of two personal referees who can comment on your suitability as a prospective carer and be interviewed by the social worker and employment references if you have worked with children and / or vulnerable adults. We will need to speak to children you have cared for and significant previous partners.

A social worker undertakes your assessment, which will look at how you would meet the care needs for the child you wish to care for. This is a sensitive assessment and will look at your own life experiences, the space you have available and the impact of caring the child may have on you and your family. It will also look at your relationship with the children, as well as your relationships with their parents and how these will be managed both in the short and long term.

A report would then be presented to a fostering panel who will give their views (make a recommendation) on whether you should be approved as a family and friends carer for a particular child. The Local Authority decision is made by someone called an Agency Decision Maker and it is this decision that will look at the recommendations and decide if you can be a foster carer.

If you cease to care for the child for whom you were approved as a foster carer, there will be an expectation that you formally resign as a foster carer.

## **What financial support will I receive?**

Once the child is placed in your care you will receive Fostering Allowance Payments. These payments are to assist you in the daily costs of caring for the child.

You cannot claim child benefit or tax credits for the child while receiving fostering allowances.

Friends and family carers do not hold parental responsibility so need to work with parents and the local authority when making decisions relating to the child in their care.

## **Contact Us**

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## **Useful Links:**

[fosterline.info/kinship-care-friends-and-family-care/](https://fosterline.info/kinship-care-friends-and-family-care/) [gov.uk/looking-after-someone-elses-child](https://gov.uk/looking-after-someone-elses-child)  
[grandparentsplus.org.uk/what-is-kinship-care](https://grandparentsplus.org.uk/what-is-kinship-care)